

# FOLK BRONZES OF WESTERN TAMILNADU



Dr. C. Maheswaran

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# **FOLK BRONZES OF WESTERN TAMILNADU**

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## FOREWORD

While the study of classical bronzes occupies the forefront of academic-cum-professional platform, the study of folk bronzes (of course, tribal bronzes as well) finds only a secondary importance. This is evident with the availability of lesser number of works on folk ( & tribal) bronzes, on the one hand and more number of available works on classical bronzes, on the other hand.

Dr. C. Maheswara, Curator for Anthropology, Government Museum, Chennai have realized this aforementioned lacuna and that is why he has ventured into the study of folk bronzes of Western Tamilnada during his curatorial service in that zone. His monograph entitled, "Folk Bronzes of Western Tamilnada" is a worthy contribution in this direction and accordingly it is included as one of the Museum Publications of 2008-2009.

I hope that this monograph will be useful to the students and scholars interested in the folk bronzes, in general and folk bronzes of Western Tamilnada, in particular.

Station : Chennai - 600 009  
Date : 29-6-2009

  
(Dr. T.S. SRIDHAR, I.A.S.,)

## PREFACE

'Bronze Casting' continues as one of the ancient rural industries of India since time immemorial. Keeping the tradition alive, in Rural Tamilnada also, the metalsmiths are found to engage in casting bronze items of both sacred and secular domains-without any discrimination.

However, it is disheartening to note that the folk bronzes – the craftsfacts born out of the metal craft of the rural areas-form a neglected field of study.

While I had an opportunity to work in the Western Tamilnada I got enthralled to observe that certain indigenous communities of that zone are in the cultural practice of utilizing anthropomorphic folk bronzes either as 'deities' or 'votive offerings'. Diving deep into the study of these folk bronzes have enabled us to unravel the cultural history of the respective indigenous communities. And the results of the study of these folk bronzes of Western Tamilnada are compiled as a monograph entitled, "Folk Bronzes of Western Tamilnada".

Viewing the significance of the subject matter and the study, this monograph is included in the publications of the Department of Museums for 2008-2009.

I hope that this will be welcomed by people of all walks of life, as a useful reference work.

Station : Chennai – 600 008  
Date : 25-6-2009

(C. MAHESWARAN)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 On Defining the 'Folk Bronzes'

The bronze artefacts which have been casted by folk artisans without adopting any codification of written iconographic and iconometric parameters to cater the needs of the folk people are termed as 'folk bronzes'. Such folk bronzes range from ritual objects such as bells, camphor burners, incense burners, goblets, figurines of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms to household utilitarian artefacts such as vessels, ladles, corbels, nutcrackers, toys.

### 1.2 Folk Bronze Tradition of India

The tradition of folk bronze casting in India is dated back to the period of Indus Valley Civilisation and consequently the chronology wherein the bronze artefacts got emerged in the annals of human civilization is designated aptly as the "bronze age". Generally, the bronze casting by the lost wax process (technically known as "Cire-perdue") is dichotomized into 'solid casting' and 'hollow casting'.

Accordingly, the folk bronzes came into vogue in India since the dawn of the bronze age (i.e., circa 3500 B.C) to till date. The famous dancing girl of the Indus Valley Civilisation (of circa 3500 B.C) and the curious mother goddess of the Megalithic Culture of Adichanallur, Tamilnadu (of circa 700 B.C) stand as testamonies to the art of casting of folk bronze in the Peninsular India. The exquisite and ornate bronze bowls from the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu speak a volume of the ancient metallurgical and artistic tradition of the Tamils. The Toda tribes of the Nilgiris are in the habit of presenting a trick and heavy plate of bronze to their daughters when they get married<sup>1</sup>. In Rural India, the household articles in the form of bronze vessels, figurines of deities in bronze are gifted to the brides by their mothers. And consequently, even after a passing of a long span of time and several stages of use the bronze artefacts are nurtured at least within the realm of rituals.

### 1.3 Artisans casting Folk Bronzes in India

The artisans who engage in casting of folk bronzes inhabit various pockets in and around India. In North India, they are known variably as 'sitthris' (in Orissa), 'Ghaustrars' (in West Bengal) and 'Chhoras' (in Bihar). As nomadic ethnic groups they roam all over the states and cater their artistic service to the needy rural people. Contrary to this, in South India, especially in Tamilnadu the folk artisans who practice the bronze casting are settled caste group known as 'Aazhazis' and they inhabit usually in the vicinity of the rural people. They form one of the sects of

Kammalans, viz., the *Pancha Kammalans*<sup>1</sup> (i.e., Goldsmiths, Ironsmiths, Potters, Woodcarvers and Sculptors). In Western Thrissur, the tradition of *Pancha Kammalan* is known as '*Pancha Kammalan Mambai*'. The folk artisans known as the *Ammachi* also take the fashioning of bronzes of anthropomorphic forms to be used as deified icons, votive offerings in the indigenous folk tradition. At present, these folk artisans engage in bronze casting by procuring used and worn out bronze utensils as scrap materials and convert them into molten alloy in crucibles and prepare lumps of bronze by pouring it into clay moulds. Such lumps of bronze are converted again as and when required into molten state and such molten alloy of bronze is in turn fabricated into requisite artefacts.

## II. GEOGRAPHIC SETTINGS OF WESTERN TAMILNADU

### 2.0 General

The districts of Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Karur and Dindigul which constitute the Western region in Tamilnadu is referred to as the "Western Tamilnadu"<sup>1</sup>. With its unifying traits apart from the differentiating traits, this region forms a distinctive culture area. As natural to a culture area, the Western Tamilnadu experiences socio-cultural pressures from its neighbouring states, viz., Karnataka and Kerala. Consequently, we could identify a 'Typical Culture Area' in its core and 'Marginal Culture Area' at its periphery<sup>2</sup>. The districts of Western Tamilnadu such as Coimbatore, Erode are in geographical contiguity with Karnataka, on the one hand and Kerala, on the other hand while the districts of Western Tamilnadu such as Karur, Dindigul are in contiguity with Kerala alone. Contrary to this, whereas the Erode district forms the typical culture area the remaining districts such as Coimbatore, Tirupur, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul constitute the marginal culture areas.

### 2.1 Ethnic Bearings of the Geographical Settings

In consonance with its geographical settings, the Western Tamilnadu is inhabited by the indigenous ethnic groups (inclusive of both tribal and non-tribal groups) and ethnic groups of migrant settlers (mostly of non-tribal groups) as well from the adjoining districts.

### III. ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTINGS OF WESTERN TAMILNADU

#### 3.0 General

Western Tamilnadu is inhabited by indigenous ethnic groups of both tribal stock and non-tribal stock. Under the tribal stock, we find ethnic groups such as Irulars, Kadars, Mudavars, Malasars (in the Coimbatore District); Skolagars, Uralis, Lambadis, Malai Goundars / Malaiyulis (in the Erode District); Palliyars (in the Dindigul District) while under the non-tribal stocks we find the ethnic groups such as Kongu Vaidiyars, Kongu Kalashars, Kongu Velaashars, Kongu Pallars, Kongu Paraiyars, Kongu Chakkiliyars, Kongu Vamsars, Kongu Navavidhars, Kongu Kalikkashars, Kongu Vamsiyars, Kongu Shanvairs, Kongu Chettiyars<sup>1</sup>, Dhavaangans (in almost all the Districts of Western Tamilnadu). On the contrary, the other sects of ethnic stock, viz., Brahmins, Konda Reddys and Marwaris also inhabit this region as the migrant settlers from other parts of Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and North India respectively, representing the non-indigenous ethnic groups.

#### 3.1 Pancha Kammaslars - the Artisan Ethnic Stocks of Tamilnadu

The Kammaslars who are construed as the offsprings of Viswakarma, the celestial master craftsman form the artisan ethnic stocks of Tamilnadu

Thattar (Goldsmiths), Karumair (Ironsmiths), Kulasar (Potters), Thachchar (Carpenters) and Shupathayar (Sculptors) have been identified as the 'Pancha Kammaslars' (Lit. Pancha "five" and Kammaslar "artisans") in the Kongu Nadu, the erstwhile region comprising the present day districts of Western Tamilnadu. It is these Pancha Kammaslars who create, fashion and fulfill the requirements of the society at large.

#### 3.2 Kongu Vaidiyars, Kongu Kalashars & Kongu Velaashars : A Brief Sketch

Among the ethnic stocks of Western Tamilnadu the Kongu Vaidiyars (the then Hunters of the Kongu region) became the settled cultivators quite a long time back and the Kongu Kalashars (the Potters) who were forced to settle in the region got acculturated with the local dominant community, viz., Kongu Velaashars (the settled Agriculturists) who played a major role in the district economy by nurturing it with their hard labour. Interestingly, all these three ethnic groups are identified to possess folk bronzes of anthropomorphic forms either as clan deities or as objects of votive offerings.

## IV. FOLK BRONZE CASTINGS IN WESTERN TAMIL NADU

### 4.0 General

As cited earlier, the folk bronze casting in Western Tamil Nadu is carried out by one of the sects of 'Pancha Kammalar'. The people of this region engage the traditional metalsmiths in their vicinity to prepare and supply the bronze artefacts to cater their needs. However, the bronze casting in Western Tamilnada got restricted to the domain of religion due to the proliferation of the metalware industry as an organised sector, on the one hand and introduction of cheaper metals of higher durability such as iron, steel, aluminium, on the other hand.

The folk bronzes which are continued to be casted till date include objects of ritual paraphernalia like lamps, bells, incense burners, camphor burners, goblets, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines. Now-a-days, even all these ritual artefacts (inclusive of the anthropomorphic figurines) are procured mostly from the nearby metal marts through direct purchase. Government corporations such as Poombuhar showroom houses bronze artefacts of all sorts and hence the practice of approaching the local traditional artisans and placing orders before them got further diminished.

The folk craft is, none the less, distinguished by unique significance in technique, conception and aesthetic appeal. In folk bronze castings, form dominates the design but for technical reasons the gaps have to be left in the wax covering they employ many kinds of ornamentation. Sometimes, the simple and straight ornamentation in the form of network is employed to bridge such gaps. However, the smaller gaps are left without ornamentation of any kind. The only exception is in the case of making anthropomorphic forms where the wire-wound wax surface is made smooth<sup>2</sup>.

Lost - wax artefacts cannot be mass-produced for technical reasons to a boom in demand. Each core has to be made and produced individually upto the stage of casting.

### 4.1 Stages of Folk Bronze Castings in Western Tamil Nadu

The successive stages in the production of bronze images by the folk technique of lost beeswax substitutes in different areas include (i) Core building, (ii) Wax preparation, (iii) Channel building, (iv) Covering the wax, (v) Crucible channeling, (vi) Crucible fitting, (vii) Casting and (viii) Finishing<sup>2</sup>.

The details of the process are as follows:

#### 4.1.1 Core Building

The core is made with a mixture of clean sand and fine clay collected from ant-hills and river side respectively. Cow or goat dung is soaked in water and then ground and mixed with clay in equal proportion. This mixture is so soft that only the simplest suggestions of a form can be achieved, laying it flat on a clear floor. Later, when it is dry, it is set up on a base. This first skeleton of the core is then covered with a layer of fine sandy clay. Subsequently, the dry core is scraped with potsherd. The scrapings are collected and mixed with water and the resulting paste is smeared over the core to serve as a polish.

#### 4.1.2 Wax Preparation

Pure beeswax is melted over an open fire and strained through a fine cloth into a basin of cold water where it becomes solid. Great care is taken to keep the wax absolutely clean and free of impurities. Next, it is squeezed through a sieve and recovered in the form of wax wire, thick or thin, as desired. Each wax thread is worked singly around the core one after another, until the whole surface is covered. Then, the wax is smoothed to form a coating of uniform thickness. The working artisan sits in the sun to let the clay core and wax coating warm up uniformly. Over this evened surface, the artisan puts on the necessary elements of the finished design. Heads, arms and legs are always added in solid wax. Sometimes, perhaps as part of the decorative drapery, or even on the figure itself, an opening is made by cutting slits in the wax coating, thus exposing the inner core.

#### 4.1.3 Channel Building

Subsequently, on the finished figure, channels are added to make freeway for the molten alloy. The channels are nothing but the wax rods sufficiently thick to facilitate easy flow of the molten, metal alloy. Two main channels are joined to the covered base.

#### 4.1.4 Covering the Wax

Now, the whole model (excepting the tips of the wax channel) is covered with layer of a mixture of equal parts of clay, sand and cow or goat dung. A second layer is added if necessary, followed by four more layers of clay and mixture of poddy husk.

#### 4.1.5 Crucible Channeling

The path from the wax model to the crucible is formed by two clay pipes. The feet of the pipes enclose the tips of the wax channel and the hands to join so as to form a single funnel. Then, two sticks of bamboo are sent through the pipes so that there is a straight, free passage from the mouth of the funnel to the wax tips. When this attachment is dry the bamboo sticks are removed.

#### 4.1.6 Crucible Fitting

The wax used in the model is weighed before use. The metal alloy required for the casting is then worked out on the basis of a portion of 10 parts of metal alloy to 1 part of wax. Then, the scraps are placed in a crucible of terracotta which exactly fits into the funnel. The charged crucible is joined to the funnel and the joint is sealed with the mixture of clay and bank. Then, the model and the crucible become a single unit, ready for firing.

#### 4.1.7 Casting

The furnace used by the folk artisans is wholly underground. The fire hole is a cylindrical one. Its bottom is connected with the surface by an air channel dug from about 1 metre away on the ground and joined to the bottom of the furnace. The inside of the furnace is smeared with cow or goat dung and made spotlessly clean. The mouth of the air channel is fixed to the bellows, made of cow hide. A layer of wood charcoal covers the bottom of the furnace upon which the figure is kept upright, with the crucible below it. It is held in position by logs piled on top of one another in triangular formation around and over the figure. The logs at the bottom of the furnace are dry wood and serve for kindling, whereas the logs at its upper areas are green and serve to reduce overheating which likely to cause cracks in the clay. The heating takes for two to three hours and during this period the fire is slowly and steadily fanned. The process of firing is watched closely and such monitoring is carried out by the artisans with great care. When the colour of the fumes given off by the mould is sulphur yellow the artisans lift the mould carefully from the fire and invert it so as to make the crucible on top and the figure directly below it. Then, the molten alloy is allowed to flow from the crucible along the clay pipe and the runner channels into the mould. In the mean time, the wax burnt out, leaving a free channel throughout the figure for the molten metal alloy to flow through. After complete pouring of the molten metal alloy the mould is kept aside. After half an hour water is sprinkled upon the mould for cooling. Then, the cooled down mould is broken and the figure casted is exposed.

#### 4.1.8 Finishing

Finishing the casting of folk bronzes begins after the casted figure is recovered from the mould and the runner channels are cut out. Then, the rough bits and slight bubbles on the figure are attended. That is, these unwanted elements are filed. After which the finished image is scoured meticulously at the river banks with clean sand, giving it a soft and polished look. In case of substantial defects, if any the artisan do not resort to welding, but restore the defective part(s). For example, if there is failure of casting in a part of a leg or an arm the artisan rebuild the missing part(s) in wax on the metal image and build channels as usual carefully seeing the fire is applied not to the metal part(s) but only to the mould of the missing part(s), resulting the recast part joined to the metal image as a whole.



## V. FOLK BRONZES OF WESTERN TAMIL NADU: AN APPRAISAL

### 5.0 General

An attempt is made to present an account of the folk bronzes, especially the anthropomorphic folk bronzes that are in use among these indigenous caste groups of Western Tamil Nadu, viz., Kongu Vettiavars, Kongu Kelasals and Kongu Vellalas inhabiting the districts of Namakkal, Salem, Erode, Karur, Tirupur and Coimbatore.

### 5.1 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu : A General Description

It is not easy to indicate the sex in these folk bronzes as ornamentation and erotic scenes are shown markedly in both male and female anthropomorphic forms. Further, both in male and female figurines the entire contour of the body is shown in slender forms (with corresponding slender form of fore limbs and hind limbs). Even the ear lobes are depicted as extended structures in both male and female forms. Hence, either by the presence or absence of moustache and beard and/or holding of flowers (in the case of female figurines)-or weapons (in the case of male figurines) the sex is differentiated and identified. Interestingly, as most of the male forms are shown normally clean shaved of their moustache and beard, it is the depiction of holding of flowers or weapons that help us in identifying the sex of these folk bronzes.

The female figurines are shown usually holding bud of lotus or lily in their right hand, leaving the left hand to hang down loosely. Contrary to this practice, most of the male figurines are depicted holding usually a weapon in their right hand while the left hand is shown as naked fist. The weapons which the male anthropomorphic forms carry may vary from bow, sword, dagger, whip, club (of different contours). If shield is shown it is depicted in the left arm, in consonance of a sword in the right arm. If bow is depicted it is being shown held by both arms (where the right arm is shown holding its curvature beam while the left arm is shown holding the straight string of it), that too over the chest.

Quite interestingly, in a single and rare attestation, a female figurine is depicted holding towards its breast a baby in its left hand. And the baby, in this attestation, is shown holding the breast of its mother (either for support or for suckling).

Both male and female anthropomorphic forms are always shown in waist cloth, extending normally upto the feet. In most of the cases, the waist cloth of both male and female anthropomorphic forms are shown with flaps or folds (through lines of incisions).

The hinder portion of the figurines are shown as tubular or vase-like forms. The vase like hinder portion is conceived to have originated from the traditional belief that the deities emerge normally from their original abode of tree. The pedestals of these anthropomorphic folk bronzes are normally circular disc in shape and quite rarely raised structures (In the shape of inverted basket-like structures).

## **5.2 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu**

The anthropomorphic folk bronzes identified from Kongu Vaettavars, Kongu Kalaiars and Kongu Vokkalars are studied in detail as follows:

### **5.2.1 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Kongu Vaettavars**

The Kongu Vaettavars who originally hailed from Vachavandi of the Namakkal District while migrating to other parts of the Western Tamil Nadu have deposited their anthropomorphic clan deities of folk bronze figurines in an earthen urn, with a vow that they will assemble in the hamlet during 'Chitra Purnami' (i.e., Full moon-day of Chithirai)<sup>1</sup> usually to observe their cultural reunions. Accordingly, they gather at Vachavandi on every Chitra Purnami, observe worshipping their clan images and then leave for the hamlet of their present habitation (leaving their clan deities). The Kongu Vaettavars who take care of these clan deities of anthropomorphic folk bronzes were honoured during this annual religious observances by others for their service to the community<sup>2</sup>.

### **5.2.2 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Kongu Kalaiars**

The Kongu Kalaiars who have been forced by their situation to migrate and settle at the erstwhile Kongu region<sup>3</sup> at present inhabit various parts of the Western Tamil Nadu such as 'Kanchikool Nadu', 'Pondarai Nadu'. As the number of their folk deities are quite a few, they formulate an agreement among themselves to take in possession of them in cyclic order of 6 months per hamlet. It is interesting to note that the Kongu Kalaiars of each hamlet plan, fix and celebrate auspicious occasions such as puberty rites, marriage rites, pre-natal rites, within this span of time. Special worship is performed while handing over the clan deities to another hamlet. A communal feast is also offered to the party which comes to receive the clan deities in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes. Likewise, the second hamlet also observes special worship to these clan-deities after installing them in their temple premises. A communal feast is offered as well to the party from the previous hamlet which accompanied these folk bronzes.

### 5.2.3 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Kongu Vellalars

Folk bronzes of anthropomorphic form are also in vogue among the Kongu Vellalars. But, contrary to the practices of both Kongu Vettavars and Kongu Kulalars, Kongu Vellalars submit anthropomorphic folk bronzes as votive offerings in fulfilling their vow for begetting children. For instance, the Kongu Vellalars of Veerapandi (in the Salem District) offer folk bronzes of male anthropomorphic form if they beget male offsprings and female anthropomorphic form, if they beget female offsprings<sup>13</sup>. The Kongu Vellalars of Mel Urundhai, near Karur are in the habit of offering male anthropomorphic folk bronzes, if they beget male offsprings by adhering a religious observance called 'kadam thuvam' (Lit. "severe penance"). All these folk bronzes are kept in safe custody in 'sami vechu' (Lit. "god's house"). It is reported that these anthropomorphic folk bronzes are taken into procession during 'pudimottam perukku' (i.e., the 18th day of the Tamil month *Aadi*)<sup>14</sup> annually to the nearby river banks and taken to the western sanctum of the Kaareer Amman temple on auspicious days such as 'Kaarthikai Elupam', 'Thai Pongal', 'Aadiperukku', 'Deepavali'.

### 5.3 Significance of Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu

The anthropomorphic folk bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu discussed so far bear physiognomic depictions, culminating in vase-like hinder portion<sup>15</sup>. These folk bronzes are realized as significant objects of tangible cultural heritage on several grounds as detailed below:

- i. The anthropomorphic folk bronzes throw more light on the artistic and the aesthetic heritage of Western Tamil Nadu (the erstwhile 'Kongu Nadu'), as they are fashioned and crafted by one of the 'Parcha Kammaalam' of Kongu region, on the request of the indigenous Kongu communities like Kongu Vettavars, Kongu Kulalars, Kongu Vellalars.
- ii. The Kongu Vettavars have undergone periodic migrations while their clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) remain sedentary. Contrary to this, among the Kongu Kulalars the clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) have undergone cyclic migrations while the people remain in their respective hamlets. This gives us a clue that the Kongu Vettavars are nomadic to the Kongu soil as their clan deities remained in one place) while the Kongu Kulalars are settlers to it (as their clan deities undertake migration)<sup>16</sup>.
- iii. It is interesting to note that the Kongu Kulalars (the traditional potters of the Kongu region) who produce terracotta images of clan deities of other communities of the

region on their request are in the habit of placing orders to folk artisans for casting of folk bronzes for their own need. Enquiries revealed that the Konga Kulakars were in the habit of producing themselves only terracotta images of their clan deities for their own use in the pastoryears. As the occasional damages occurred to these terracotta images on untrouge have caused sentimental outburst, they shifted themselves to the practice of placing orders with metalurgists to cast folk bronzes. In this juncture, it is of worth mentioning here of a folk bronze of the Konga Kulakars shown seated over an inverted pot<sup>17</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the bronzes that are in utility among the tribal people are also designated as 'folk bronzes' as they are crafted mostly by artisans belonging to non-tribal stock. However, we should bear in mind that the tribal people are also found at crafting of bronze icons, especially in the Central Indian belt.
- <sup>2</sup> Yet another practice of bronze casting known as 'piece moulding' is also prevalent which has been carried out quite rarely and that too for preparing robust bronzes only. However, at the onset, the requisite pieces were fabricated out of 'solid casting' process.
- <sup>3</sup> Personal communication from the Toda activist Tint, Visuvanelli Pothili Kattaa, Karthi Murali, Uthayaramaniam, The Nilgiris.
- <sup>4</sup> The Government Museum, Erode is in possession of a fragment of copper plate document revealing the 'Pancha Karmasalai' in action-depicted beautifully over it.
- <sup>5</sup> The Western Tamilnada constitutes the major portion of the erstwhile 'Kongu Nadu', one of the five major land divisions of ancient Tamilchagam.
- <sup>6</sup> For details on 'Typical Culture Area' and 'Marginal Culture Area' Cf. the Dictionary of Anthropology by E.B. Tylor
- <sup>7</sup> Most of the ethnonyms under the non-tribal indigenous caste groups bear an attribute 'Kongu' in accordance to the land divisions, namely, the Kongu Nadu in which they inhabited for very many generations.
- <sup>8</sup> For instance, Anagpurpalayam, a semi-urban hamlet within the Tirupur taluk of the Tirupur District of Western Tamilnada is famous for manufacture of bronze and brass utensils.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Dolchura', the Central Indian folk bronze and brass artefacts vary contrastingly with their South Indian counterparts, by revealing the crated designs with obvious gaps in fabrication.
- <sup>10</sup> Even in the stages of casting of folk bronzes also, the Central India differs considerably with that of the South India.
- <sup>11</sup> Steps have been taken to register these folk bronzes by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnada under the Indian Antiquities, Monuments & Art Treasures Act for a long time. But, this venture could not have fructified as the Kongu Vaethuvam of Vudhavandi (of the Namakkal District) have not taken up even the requisite initiatives towards this direction.

- <sup>12</sup> For details Cf. "Madhukkani Pattayam of the Kongu Vellalar" that has been identified and published in the book entitled, *Kongu Naattu Samadhaaya Aaranangal* by Dr. S. Raja.
- <sup>13</sup> Out of the 36 such folk bronzes, the authorities of the Kaseroi Amman temple of Vennipandi (of the Salem District) have gifted a dozen specimens to the various museums in Erode, viz., the Government Museum, the Kalaimagal Kalvi Nilayam Archaeological Museum and the History Museum of the Vellalar College for Women.
- <sup>14</sup> Personal communication from Dr.S. Raja, Convener, Kongu Research Centre, Erode.
- <sup>15</sup> This reminds us the emerging of spirits / deities from their abode of tree, observe the cultural anthropologists.
- <sup>16</sup> Interestingly enough, such practice of encourage of folk deities have been identified among the Kongu Shaanans as well, reports Thiru. M. Guruselvan, Research Scholar, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History, Arcotikatti, Coimbatore.
- <sup>17</sup> This particular anthropomorphic folk bronze is identified from the Karur District by Dr. R. Perungundan, the then Registration Officer of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu.

## VI. SUMMARY

The bronze icons which have been casted by folk artisans without adopting any codification of written iconographic and iconometric parameters to cater the needs of the folk people constitute the folk bronzes. They vary in range from secular objects to sacred objects. While the household utilitarian artefacts such as vessels, ladles, combs, nutcrackers, toys, etc., form the secular objects the objects of ritual paraphernalia such as bells, scepter burners, incense burners, goblets, figurines of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms comprise the sacred objects.

In India, the folk bronzes are in vogue since the dawn of 'bronze age' (i.e., circa 3500 B.C.) till date. Both secular and sacred bronze artefacts are continued to be gifted to the brides by their mothers in tribal and rural belts throughout India (irrespective of the geographic barriers such as 'North', 'Central', 'South').

Casting of folk bronzes is carried out by traditional artisans of metal craft. And these folk artisans cater their artistic service to the needy people (both in tribal and rural belts)

The districts of Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul which constitute the Western region in Tamilnadu is referred to as the 'Western Tamilnadu'. With its unifying traits (apart from the differentiating traits) this region forms a distinctive culture area.

In consequence, with its geographical settings, the Western Tamilnadu is inhabited by the indigenous ethnic groups (of both tribal and non-tribal stocks) apart from the migrant settlers.

Among the ethnic stocks of Western Tamilnadu the Vettuvans (the then hunters) of the erstwhile Kongu region, became settled cultivators quite a long time back and the Kongu Kalahars (the potter) who were forced to settle in this region got acculturated with the local dominant community, viz., the Kongu Vellalars (the settled agriculturalists) who play a major role in the district economy. Interestingly, all these above cited three ethnic groups are identified to possess folk bronzes of anthropomorphic forms which were fabricated by local artisans, the 'Ammalar', one of the 'Pancha Kammalar'. While the Kongu Vettuvans and Kongu Kalahars possess them as their 'clan deities' the Kongu Vellalars are found to offer them as 'votive offerings' to their clan deities as and when they beget offsprings.

The above cited ethnic groups engage the traditional metalmiths in their vicinity to prepare and supply the bronze artefacts cater to their needs. However, the bronze castings in Western Tamilnadu got restricted to the domain of religion due to the proliferation of the metalware industry as an organized sector, on the one hand and introduction of cheaper metals of relatively

of higher durability, on the other hand. The casting of the folk bronzes are carried out in successive stages of (i) Core building, (ii) Wax preparation, (iii) Channel building, (iv) Covering the wax, (v) Crucible channelling, (vi) Crucible filling, (vii) Casting and (viii) Finishing.

The folk bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu, especially the anthropomorphic forms are revealed as significant objects of tangible cultural heritage on several grounds as detailed below:

The Kongu Vairavars have undergone periodic migrations while their clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) remain sedentary. On the contrary, among the Kongu Kulasars the clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) have undergone cyclic migrations while the people remain in their respective hamlets.

This gives us a clue that the Kongu Vairavars are native to the Kongu soil (as their clan deities remained in one place) while the Kongu Kulasars are settlers to it (as their clan deities undertook migrations).



## VII. CONCLUSION

According to Rath Reeves (as quoted in Meera Mukherji, 1977:1), "So robust is the link in Craftsmen's reluctance to take leave of their traditional craft materials, techniques and design roots that it might almost be called one of their most outstanding culture patterns. Perhaps this reason why India is virtually the only country planted firmly in a handicraft era reaching back over a time cycle of five millennia".

Sadhanga Kumar Ray (as quoted in Meera Mukherji, 1977:1) feels that the metal statues ... appear to have originated in ... magic and beliefs, gradually. Further, he observes that the "religio-magical statues were actually constructed with cane and bamboo long before the beginning of the use of metal by their inventors. That is why, in these primitive statues the vivid mark of wicker work is conspicuously stamped. Hence, they looked at metal through the medium of cane and bamboo. As a result, the metal images of first stages were cast (in cane - perdue method) in complete imitation of cane seeds, upon a pedestal made in imitation of a bamboo-stretcher with cross-cross seeds. For instance, an elephant image, the rigid legs reminds... of knotted bamboo stumps, the flat spirals of the ears of carefully coiled cane and even the head was curiously patterned on a winnowing fan made of split bamboo strips.

Accuracy, precision and an innate aesthetic feelings are the key notes of the folk metal artisans in casting the required folk metal images. A special attitude of mind is again conveyed up in producing ritual objects. The thought that some particular objects will be used in worship for inducing devotion may be the driving force behind the minds of the artisans while they cast the ritual objects. Inevitably, this makes the artisan approach his work with a devotion similar to that of a worshipper.

It is needless to point out that the best works of the artisans are made when they are creatively inspired. In such moods they would concentrate upon a work which calls for undisturbed contemplation, as well as sustained technical effort born out of long practice. When they are urged by the sway of a creative rhythm, they work quite hard and produce a series of fascinating works.

The folk artisans have developed their inherent aesthetic sense and technique through a process of trial and error, success and failure over a long period of time. Instead of heedless experiments for "outstripping" tradition, it is always better to let the tradition orient itself to the changing environments.

In Western Tamilnadu although the folk bronzes in anthropomorphic forms are attested among the Kongu Vettuvans, the Kongu Kulakars and the Kongu Vellalars the practice of offering them as 'figurines for worship' or as 'figurines for votive offering' could help us to draw the differentiating line. And hence, from such differentiating line we may conjecture that the use of anthropomorphic folk bronzes as objects of votive offering among the Kongu Vellalars might have originated by adopting the actual practice of upkeeping of such folk bronzes as clan deities by other two Kongu communities, viz., the Kongu Vettuvans and the Kongu Kulakars.

Moreover, as the observance of offering of the folk bronzes of anthropomorphic forms are not attested among all sects of the Kongu Vellalars but only in Vetrupandi (of the Salem District) and Mel Urakkai (of the Karur District), the conjecture gets strengthened further.

**APPENDIX - I**

**CLAN DIVISIONS  
OF  
KONGU VAETTUVARS,  
KONGU KULAALARS  
&  
KONGU VAELAALARS**

## A. CLAN DIVISIONS OF KONGU VAETTUVARS

The Kongu Vaettuvuvar Caste group is sub-divided into the following 191 clans:

1.	Aadla	Vaettuvuvar
2.	Aalchandhira	Vaettuvuvar
3.	Aadhava	Vaettuvuvar
4.	Akkini	Vaettuvuvar
5.	Allala	Vaettuvuvar
6.	Annai moala	Vaettuvuvar
7.	Anava	Vaettuvuvar
8.	Arala	Vaettuvuvar
9.	Aappa	Vaettuvuvar
10.	Aamai	Vaettuvuvar
11.	Irumbuli	Vaettuvuvar
12.	Ilanga	Vaettuvuvar
13.	Indira	Vaettuvuvar
14.	Ingara	Vaettuvuvar
15.	Urulappadi	Vaettuvuvar
16.	Uyara	Vaettuvuvar
17.	Ulya	Vaettuvuvar
18.	Uvuvaga	Vaettuvuvar
19.	Umbi	Vaettuvuvar
20.	Uthara	Vaettuvuvar
21.	Ururu	Vaettuvuvar
22.	Uthala	Vaettuvuvar
23.	Uyir	Vaettuvuvar
24.	Unnaadi	Vaettuvuvar
25.	Oruadi	Vaettuvuvar
26.	Kaaji	Vaettuvuvar
27.	Karadi	Vaettuvuvar
28.	Karalya	Vaettuvuvar
29.	Karatu	Vaettuvuvar
30.	Kathirukalai	Vaettuvuvar
31.	Kadukalai	Vaettuvuvar
32.	Karpona	Vaettuvuvar
33.	Kadambuli	Vaettuvuvar
34.	Karippadi	Vaettuvuvar
35.	Kadappa	Vaettuvuvar
36.	Kalinga	Vaettuvuvar

37.	Karandi	Vastivar
38.	Karumbanidhi	Vastivar
39.	Karuvanda	Vastivar
40.	Kasai	Vastivar
41.	Kandai	Vastivar
42.	Kanna	Vastivar
43.	Kanri	Vastivar
44.	Kantta	Vastivar
45.	Kankharandi	Vastivar
46.	Karai	Vastivar
47.	Kanahaya	Vastivar
48.	Kinhangs	Vastivar
49.	Kecrai	Vastivar
50.	Kanriya	Vastivar
51.	Kodumi	Vastivar
52.	Kerandhai	Vastivar
53.	Kumandi	Vastivar
54.	Kuzungadi	Vastivar
55.	Kulava	Vastivar
56.	Kurukhal	Vastivar
57.	Kurumi	Vastivar
58.	Kurumba	Vastivar
59.	Koochchandhal	Vastivar
60.	Kozumba	Vastivar
61.	Kali	Vastivar
62.	Kottappuli	Vastivar
63.	Koduvadi	Vastivar
64.	Kodumba	Vastivar
65.	Kodumbali	Vastivar
66.	Korai	Vastivar
67.	Kaymaga	Vastivar
68.	Kandhasda	Vastivar
69.	Kozumali	Vastivar
70.	Kandhasri	Vastivar
71.	Sarakku	Vastivar
72.	Selangi	Vastivar
73.	Sarikandi	Vastivar
74.	Sakkali	Vastivar
75.	Sandi	Vastivar
76.	Sandhappadi	Vastivar

77.	Silai	Vattavaz
78.	Sirathakali	Vattavaz
79.	Suvada	Vattavaz
80.	Suvathai	Vattavaz
81.	Suli	Vattavaz
82.	Sundai	Vattavaz
83.	Sunda	Vattavaz
84.	Sunguna	Vattavaz
85.	Sura	Vattavaz
86.	Sreedharan	Vattavaz
87.	Soma	Vattavaz
88.	Sotai	Vattavaz
89.	Sufia	Vattavaz
90.	Sufiya	Vattavaz
91.	Tharuvanda	Vattavaz
92.	Thalai	Vattavaz
93.	Thala	Vattavaz
94.	Thanga	Vattavaz
95.	Tharai	Vattavaz
96.	Thondai	Vattavaz
97.	Thambai	Vattavaz
98.	Tharkha	Vattavaz
99.	Tharulu	Vattavaz
100.	Tharuti	Vattavaz
101.	Thoyyal	Vattavaz
102.	Thurai	Vattavaz
103.	Tharja	Vattavaz
104.	Thatchanki	Vattavaz
105.	Tharpi	Vattavaz
106.	Tharipa	Vattavaz
107.	Tharumba	Vattavaz
108.	Thakka	Vattavaz
109.	Thatchathkin	Vattavaz
110.	Thara	Vattavaz
111.	Tharba	Vattavaz
112.	Tharaba	Vattavaz
113.	Tharban	Vattavaz
114.	Tharasi	Vattavaz
115.	Tharipa	Vattavaz
116.	Tharall	Vattavaz

117.	Panappi	Vettuvaz
118.	Panippadai	Vettuvaz
119.	Panna	Vettuvaz
120.	Pannadi	Vettuvaz
121.	Panippadai	Vettuvaz
122.	Paranal	Vettuvaz
123.	Palla	Vettuvaz
124.	Pambai	Vettuvaz
125.	Paruthala	Vettuvaz
126.	Palagai	Vettuvaz
127.	Panava	Vettuvaz
128.	Parappala	Vettuvaz
129.	Pattalira	Vettuvaz
130.	Pandiya	Vettuvaz
131.	Pannarai	Vettuvaz
132.	Pala	Vettuvaz
133.	Piramba	Vettuvaz
134.	Pethala	Vettuvaz
135.	Ponadi	Vettuvaz
136.	Pudhara	Vettuvaz
137.	Papa	Vettuvaz
138.	Panna	Vettuvaz
139.	Pai	Vettuvaz
140.	Poochchandhal	Vettuvaz
141.	Poovaniya	Vettuvaz
142.	Pallai	Vettuvaz
143.	Pootura	Vettuvaz
144.	Pozha	Vettuvaz
145.	Pacronjai	Vettuvaz
146.	Piyana	Vettuvaz
147.	Ponanal	Vettuvaz
148.	Ponai	Vettuvaz
149.	Poothran	Vettuvaz
150.	Maniya	Vettuvaz
151.	Malaiya	Vettuvaz
152.	Mudhira	Vettuvaz
153.	Maida	Vettuvaz
154.	Mandandha	Vettuvaz
155.	Mandachandi	Vettuvaz
156.	Mandhappadai	Vettuvaz

157.	Mansa	Vastavar
158.	Morila	Vastavar
159.	Mugala	Vastavar
160.	Mumadi	Vastavar
161.	Muchika	Vastavar
162.	Muli	Vastavar
163.	Mumai	Vastavar
164.	Moolai	Vastavar
165.	Moola	Vastavar
166.	Moyva	Vastavar
167.	Moolai	Vastavar
168.	Muchimali	Vastavar
169.	Mina	Vastavar
170.	Munkka	Vastavar
171.	Meela	Vastavar
172.	Rauli	Vastavar
173.	Mouga	Vastavar
174.	Makga	Vastavar
175.	Mauli	Vastavar
176.	Mugai	Vastavar
177.	Maryamangala	Vastavar
178.	Milaka	Vastavar
179.	Mli	Vastavar
180.	Minga	Vastavar
181.	Mitiya	Vastavar
182.	Mura	Vastavar
183.	Misipa	Vastavar
184.	Mugachchi	Vastavar
185.	Mugaurji	Vastavar
186.	Mupa	Vastavar
187.	Milla	Vastavar
188.	Mui	Vastavar
189.	Mundhai	Vastavar
190.	Mudhari	Vastavar
191.	Moyvaandha	Vastavar



## B. CLAN DIVISIONS OF KONGU KULAALARS

The Kongu Kulaalar Cast group is sub-divided into the following 32 clans:

1.	Vynasa	richi	gachtham
2.	Kasaba	richi	gachtham
3.	Kalikkasota	maha richi	gachtham
4.	Karthama	richi	gachtham
5.	Mankanda	richi	gachtham
6.	Kaka	richi	gachtham
7.	Kanchika	richi	gachtham
8.	Erama	richi	gachtham
9.	Kanchaya	richi	gachtham
10.	Brama	richi	gachtham
11.	Masabi	richi	gachtham
12.	Namula	richi	gachtham
13.	Sagappirama	richi	gachtham
14.	Pachaga	richi	gachtham
15.	Masuvakkirama	richi	gachtham
16.	Biga	richi	gachtham
17.	Angurama	richi	gachtham
18.	Samanala	richi	gachtham
19.	Parasa	richi	gachtham
20.	Pakala	richi	gachtham
21.	Kachabaga	richi	gachtham
22.	Athali	richi	gachtham
23.	Sagayama	richi	gachtham
24.	Viraga	richi	gachtham
25.	Thalheendi	richi	gachtham
26.	Vallata	richi	gachtham
27.	Pachajaliya	richi	gachtham
28.	Madhaga	richi	gachtham
29.	Elurathiruvana	richi	gachtham
30.	Vallamaga	richi	gachtham
31.	Kanaga	richi	gachtham
32.	Vyakrama	richi	gachtham

### C. CLAN DIVISIONS OF KONGU VAEALAALARS

The Kongu Vaelaalar Caste group is sub-divided into the following 35 clans.

1.	Aadharvan	koottam
2.	Aarva	koottam
3.	Aadavar	koottam
4.	Aandhar	koottam
5.	Eesai	koottam
6.	Olakkar	koottam
7.	Qodharudhar	koottam
8.	Kaman	koottam
9.	Kamavadar	koottam
10.	Kasali	koottam
11.	Kozai	koottam
12.	Kalayur	koottam
13.	Kozai	koottam
14.	Chamban	koottam
15.	Chennamoodhar	koottam
16.	Challan	koottam
17.	Cheruvayur	koottam
18.	Chozai	koottam
19.	Tharunajayam	koottam
20.	Thachinj	koottam
21.	Thozai	koottam
22.	Elavarasodhar	koottam
23.	Thoodai	koottam
24.	Narandiyar	koottam
25.	Pandi	koottam
26.	Peddiyar	koottam
27.	Pevudhar	koottam
28.	Pedharan	koottam
29.	Pandiyam	koottam
30.	Pillai	koottam
31.	Pandhal	koottam
32.	Polyamam	koottam
33.	Perungadiyam	koottam
34.	Pomai	koottam
35.	Poddiyar	koottam

**APPENDIX - II**  
**SELECT PHOTOGRAPHS**  
**OF**  
**ANTHROPOMORPHIC FOLK BRONZES**  
**STUDIED FROM**  
**WESTERN TAMIL NADU**







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